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PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

Programme 22. Palestinian refugees

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22.1 The overall strategy for this programme is to provide assistance to the Palestine refugee population until matters are resolved. That assistance involves the provision of essential education, health and relief and social services to eligible Palestine refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Emergency relief assistance and ad hoc assistance in response to requests from the Palestinian Authority, the host Governments and the Secretary-General are likewise rendered to the beneficiary population.

22.2 The mandate for this programme is General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949, which established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as a separate entity within the United Nations system. By its resolution 3331 (XXIX) B of 17 December 1974, the General Assembly decided that, with effect from 1 January 1975, the expenses for salaries of international staff in the service of UNRWA which would otherwise be a charge on voluntary contributions should be financed by the regular budget of the United Nations for the duration of the Agency's mandate, which has been repeatedly renewed, most recently until June 1999.

22.3 UNRWA reports directly to the General Assembly. Overall review of UNRWA programmes and activities is undertaken by the 10-member Advisory Commission, which includes representatives of the Agency's major donor and host Governments. The Advisory Commission has a working relationship with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

22.4 The implementation of the overall strategy involves the provision of:

(a) Education services, to meet the basic educational needs of Palestine refugees and to enhance their educational opportunities;

(b) Health services, to meet the refugees' basic health needs and improve the overall state of health of their community;

(c) Relief and social services, to provide refugees with assistance in meeting their needs, in maintaining a reasonable standard of existence and in improving their capacity to become more self-reliant, thereby reducing their dependence on such assistance.

22.5 UNRWA entered a new era in its relationship with the Palestinian people with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area, and the extension of self-rule to the rest of the West Bank. It has rendered emergency relief assistance to Palestine refugees affected by the political turmoil in Lebanon since 1982 and thus provided similar emergency measures to refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since the beginning of 1988. UNRWA will continue to maintain the other services that it has provided for some 50 years. The Agency will attach great importance to preparations for the eventual transfer of its installations, services and programmes to local authorities.

22.6 The Agency's concern for the self-reliance of the refugee community and its commitment to the long-term viability of the programmes that it will eventually transfer will make self-reliance and sustainability key themes of its

activities. Where feasible and desirable, UNRWA will continue to introduce cost-sharing and self-support measures in its regular programmes, to ensure the efficient use of resources and to support participation by the beneficiary population in the provision of Agency services. In the relief and social services sector, the Agency seeks to achieve the full community management of its women's programme centres, community rehabilitation centres and youth activity centres by 1999. It will continue to promote sustainable economic activity through its income-generation programme.

22.7 Under its peace implementation programme, UNRWA will continue to undertake projects to improve infrastructure and stabilize socio-economic conditions in the Agency's five fields of operation, in accordance with the needs of the refugee population and to the extent permitted by donor funds. Implementation of projects funded prior to 1998, including some that have already received funding, may extend into the period 1998-2001. The second phase of the peace implementation programme, now under way, is expected to be the last major investment initiative undertaken by the Agency.

22.8 The Agency's ability to carry out its work programme depends on voluntarily contributed funds being made available to it by the international community. UNRWA faces the principal challenge of maintaining the level of its services within those resources. As a result of inflation and natural growth in the refugee population, the Agency's budget has traditionally had to expand by 5 per cent per year in order to provide the same level of services. Accordingly, measures to streamline Agency operations and to achieve savings through localization of posts and similar measures will be emphasized. The relocation of its headquarters from Vienna to the Gaza Strip in July 1996 will allow increased efforts in human resource development. The Agency's 22,000 area staff members or locally recruited staff, all of whom are paid from voluntary contributions, will play an increasing role in providing essential services to the Palestinian refugee community and in harmonizing services with those provided by the Palestinian public sector in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.